



**ASHEVILLE TRANSIT COMMISSION**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**First Floor Conference Room - City Hall**  
**November 6, 2012**  
**3:30 PM - 5:30 PM**

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**Attending:**

Commission Members: Julie Mayfield, Dave Erb, Kevin Jenkins, Ken O'Connor, Tom Tomlin

Staff: Ken Putnam, Mariate Echeverry, Norman Schenck, Janet GeorgeMurr

Community Members: M. H. Churney

3:30 pm:

- ❑ Julie Mayfield, Chairman, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone;
- ❑ Julie stated that due to lack of public attendance, the reading of the Announcement for Public Comment and introductions by TC and staff were not made

● **November 6, 2012 Agenda review and approval:** Agenda was approved unanimously

● **TC transit experience in riding the bus:**

- ❑ Tom reported that he has received less complaints and/or questions now that the N goes to the ART Station and the schedule is tighter. Tom recommends cutting through Hilliard Avenue to the ART Station rather than going to the square (Pritchard Park). Tom reports that S1 is doing well
- ❑ Ken O - does not have anything to report, at this time.
- ❑ Julie - experience on the bus has been good.
- ❑ Dave - reports the same as Julie.
- ❑ Kevin - experience has been "mostly fine."

● **October 16, 2012 Transit Commission Retreat Minutes Approval:** Ken O. moved to approve the 10/16/12 Retreat minutes as written; Dave seconded and carried unanimously.

● **New Business:**

- ❑ Transit Commission Applicants: After TC reviewed the information packet of each applicant for Transit Commission, a group discussion and subsequent voting to recommend to City Council, candidates for the next Transit Commission. Bruce Emory was the unanimous recommendation, followed by Itiyopia Ewart and George Keller who received equal votes. Dave Erb abstained.
- ❑ Clarification of the wording on the bus schedules for discounts for students/children under 6YO. Tom suggested changing the wording on the bus schedules regarding discounts which is confusing to riders. Tom gave a brief story of an incident of a grandmother with a 6YO child. The following language will be changed on the bus schedules and website:
  1. Children under 5YO and younger ride free; and
  2. Students ages 6 through 19YO elementary/middle/High School
  3. 65 YO and older for discounts

Mariate stated that this will be edited on the website and schedules.

● **OLD BUSINESS:**

- ❑ Transit Commission Goals: Julie asked TC members of further ideas or questions about the four goals that were agreed upon at the Retreat, as follows:
  1. Supporting Implementation of the Transit Master Plan
  2. Improve Rider Experience
  3. Improve Communication with Drivers
  4. Improve Communication with County Transit System

Julie reminded each of the team leaders (Julie, Georgia, Dave, Ken) to have at least one meeting of each of the subcommittees before the December TC meeting to discuss the choosing and prioritizing the tasks; to get timelines in

place; and who will be responsible for each task. Julie stated that the TC Goals will be on the monthly agenda and will report on TC members' progress. Julie mentioned to Dave and Kevin of the improve riders experience meeting on Friday 11/16/12 at 2:30pm in the Transportation Conference Room.

- Media response to roll out: Dave presented the letter he wrote to Mountain Express for review. Dave stated that in the author bio in Mtn. Express it will be printed that Julie is the Chairman and Dave is the Vice-Chairman of the TC and described that TC is a citizen volunteer board that advises City Council.
- MAHEC Health Express Update: Julie stated that Ken P. and Mariate will meet with MAHEC and Mission only. Care Partners will not have enough patients to justify significant resources to be part of the Health Express. At the meeting, Ken P and Mariate proposed the route from Biltmore Avenue through the Mission campus to the new MAHEC campus and return, which is a 45 minute run from ART Station. Norman stated that it will also stop at the Minnie Jones Building. There will also be evening hours at MAHEC for the Family Practice Clinic, which will run on weekdays 8:30am-9:30pm of 14 hour days to run the bus. Ken P stated that Health Express will also be running a few hours on Saturdays from 8:30am - 12:30pm. The cost is approximately \$300,000/year. The possibility of reducing this cost for operating the Health Express is being explored. Mission will be researching potential Mission Foundation funding and will ask Buncombe County to be a part of the Health Express. The reason for the MAHEC hours is to reduce the burden on the Emergency Room and 911, which is a benefit to Buncombe County and the County's emergency response services. Councilman Gordon Smith will talk with the County.

Ken P. explained to TC his role as a new member of the NC Health and Human Services Board. The 19 member Board's first inaugural meeting was held recently. Due to the State's requirement to have an engineer on the Board, Ken was invited to participate. The Board meeting is a formal setting similar to the City Council or a County Commission meeting which includes an audience and is filmed.

Ken P. has a meeting with Mandy Stone and a staff member on Friday 11/9/12 to discuss the Health Express and to gauge the interest and to approach this issue in a more holistic standpoint. In order for Mission Hospital to maintain the non-profit entity, it is obligated to provide ER services that gives back to the community, which is costly. MAHEC will be combining all of their services into one campus located in the Town of Biltmore Forest which is anticipated to open in July, 2013. If there is an opportunity to provide transit services to the new MAHEC facility for the same people who use the ER services would reduce the emergency service costs. The new MAHEC will have full dental and physician care; and any one can use MAHEC as their primary physician. MAHEC anticipates approximately 100,000 patient visits per year and Mission could see a decrease in the emergency room care. With this plan in place a number of opportunities:

1. Mission will be able to take care of the people who really need the ER in receiving speedier service; and
2. This will cut Mission Hospital's costs in using the savings to operate the Health Express;
3. A suggestion was to have the County redistribute funding by offering MAHEC services;
4. In addition to the regular bus schedule to Minnie Jones Health on Biltmore Avenue, the Health Express will

also stop once or twice an hour.

Julie stated the Health Express is not only a new bus route but as part of a solution to a larger health care problem and getting people better access to care. Health Express will come down Biltmore Avenue; turn on Hospital Drive; up Victoria; then go around Mission campus and come out on Biltmore Avenue to MAHEC campus and repeat. There will not be a special bus, but could be one of the Gastonia buses. Julie stated that the meeting with MAHEC and Mission will continue monthly until this issue is resolved hopefully by July 2013 when the Family Practice opens.

## **STAFF UPDATES:**

### **• Transit Master Plan Implementation:** Mariate stated:

- Routes C and N have slight changes which began on 11/1/12:

Route C will go to Pearson Bridge

Route N will go to the ART Station twice an hour.

Mariate stated challenges on Patton and Asheland Avenue with the traffic light. Since there is a protected left turn lane but not a left turn signal, it is very difficult for the bus to be on time; this is being discussed with the traffic engineer. Ken P. stated that this intersection is the City's but tied in with the overall system with College and Patton Avenue. Two things would need to occur:

1. To study and make a decision as to whether or not the protected left is warranted;
2. In order to adjust the traffic light to have a left turn signal at Patton and Asheland there will be timing changes to

other signals in the same system.

- ❑ Public Meeting on Thursday 11/1/12 was attended by approximately 15 people. Mariate stated that she was not surprised since there were a lot of people completing the surveys at the ART Station and had the opportunity to voice an opinion. There were paper surveys, flyers indicating how to complete the survey online; and sent it through IRIDE and in the press release for the link to the survey. We have received 500 surveys and will be doing another survey for route C since the bus did not go to the ART Station. There will be one person on Route C handing out the surveys which will cover all of the routes. In order to implement the temporary change, the service equity analysis was completed on Route E1, the next step is to have a public meeting and outreach.
- ❑ Transit Master Plan: Target date is 1/1/2013 for the following implementation:
  1. Holiday Service to begin;
  2. E1 will be permanent route;
  3. Gathering information from the surveys regarding Route C and N to optimize the transfers.

● **Review of ART monthly reports:**

- ❑ Monthly Reports: Mariate stated that the Ridership reports are the same from the past TC meetings but have improved to show the data since the implementation date. When looking at the ranks, the routes are in different positions:
  1. E1 is always #1; W1 is #2;
  2. The graph shows the ridership for September showing the increase of N1 which is mostly evening service that is extended and because UNC-A is in session.
  3. The ridership has decreased 6% compared to the same month last year. It was observed with the audited numbers for October there will be a slight increase to the positive. The final numbers will be reviewed during the December TC meeting.

Passport ridership stats: Mariate stated that the numbers are decreasing from last year. July and August are lower;

1. UNC-A in July is stable and August has increased;
2. Grove Park Inn - route N the numbers are half. Staff is speaking with GPI HR Dept to identify what population is being affected. As common knowledge that many people who work at GPI are living in the Emma neighborhood. With the new transfers and the burden from Emma neighborhood to Downtown are riders are using other modes of transportation. The staff is watching this closely. Julie asked Mariate to ask GPI if running the buses later would help. Mariate stated that they are working on adjusting N route.

Norman's reported that the new fence at the ART Station had a number of complaints because people need to walk farther. Riders who walk with a cane will need to walk around the fence rather than walking in front of the buses. The complaints have stopped for the past week. Drivers like the fence and will work towards making the fence a permanent structure.

Comments and Suggestions Log: Norman stated there hasn't been much change to the Comment and Suggestion Log since the last report. Julie asked if the analysis is still being done similar to the September report of a document that ranked the complaints/comments regarding particular routes. Norman will reformat the ranking of the complaints to track the measure. Julie stated that it is helpful to get a sense of priority to the complaints and concerns as well as the second E1 for complaints/comments. Mariate stated that we can replicate the data; once the format is set then Norman could continue to enter the data. All complaints from IRIDE are forwarded to Norman and share documents. Most complaints go to Norman in order for the issue to be researched and added to the list.

● **Status of RFPs:** Mariate and Norman reported:

1. The roof is complete and the punch list is finished and waiting for the final inspection. As a result of the completion, Operations have new high energy lighting. COA is working on a project from the Office of Sustainability that is related to solar energy. Maggie Ullman and Erik Hayden of Building Safety are looking at roofs in city buildings to install infrastructure to get power from solar panels and the garage could be one of those. A meeting will be scheduled with Maggie soon. Ken P asked when there is a need to replace the roof and who pays for the bills. Norman stated that the solar panel company would pay since the space is leased and paying COA a fee for the lease. Mariate stated it will be leased to the solar panel company for several years and then it would be the responsibility of COA to absorb the costs. Dave stated that the typical model does have it turned over at a very attractive price in 6-7 years. The electricity goes into the grid and the business owner will buy off the grid and the goal is to get the system at a lower cost. The City is not in a position to take a tax credit on it but the investors in the solar business are. The garage roof is a 30 year roof and the solar panels would be C-clamped on the roof.

2. Support vehicles have been ordered and will be receiving two Equinox by November 16, 2012. There are additional support vehicles that Ken P has in the capital improvement request.
3. Cameras are on hold in order to do a sole source since ART has acquired part of the equipment because of replacing cameras that were broken. Staff was going to Council but IT asked to place a hold to make sure that IT can handle the cameras on the buses. The new cameras are new technology which is more reliable but they are able to identify events. If the driver hits a curb the camera will record that specific event and will alert operations that the incident happened and the system wireless
4. Bid for bus shelter installation was received. Two grants from ARRA and CDBG had to bid it out and now have a preferred vendor to install 10 shelters in four to five months. Tom commented that the Plexiglas on the bus shelter at Asheville Mall needs to be replaced. Mariate stated that the glass has been replaced by the Asheville Mall several times and that COA will need to get an easement from the Asheville Mall in order to maintain the shelter. Mariate stated that staff will continue to look into this matter.
5. Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) bid for pedestrian signal for Clingman Avenue. Only one bid was received which was over the budget and since it was a low bid the price cannot be negotiated. Therefore a rebid will be out by the end of this week 11/9/12. Three more signal bids will be forthcoming.
6. Four out of the 9 new buses have been delivered. The last buses to be received will be the hybrids. All of the diesels are in production and by 11/15/12 all of the buses should be received except for one hybrid that is in a show in Portland OR. Installation of the BRT front which is a very slick design with rounded windshields with a lot of visibility and windows are continuous without the frames outside but inside. Operations will need to transfer some of the equipment, i.e. fareboxes and programming the annunciation system. The ETA for the new buses to be on the road is mid-December. The old buses will be auctioned.

Ken P. stated that there is a fleet of 21 buses with 16 routes and 17 buses running. Now that the 9 new replacement buses have arrived, the best of the 1996 nine buses will be saved and dispose of the remaining old buses. The additional two Gastonia buses will give transit the ability to have two used buses that have more "life" than the nine old buses. In looking ahead, the 2006 buses will need to be replaced in 2018; the 2004 Gastonia 35 ft buses will be replaced in 2016. Transit Division will apply for two new buses two years prior to a grant application that is normally done. We will also know how well a 35ft foot bus will work within the City system and topography which will help in making future decisions in replacing the fleet. Ken continued to say that one of the challenges is having a manufacturer build a 30ft bus.

Ken P.'s goal is to have more than 4 or 5 spare buses to give flexibility in responding to instances more quickly, such as the E1.

Julie asked if the incremental costs in keeping one of the old buses on the road would be \$83.00 per hour or higher. Ken P. stated that an extra driver would be needed if there is an additional 3 or 4 routes, instead of having 15 drivers, a pool of 16 or 17 drivers would be required and that the incremental cost increase is being researched.

Ken P. stated that the extra E1 route was able to be absorbed by the existing budget.

A meeting with Lauren Bradley, CFO, is scheduled.

Mariate stated that according to the TMP the next big thing is additional drivers; and S4 high ridership.

7. Gastonia Buses - Mariate reported that this went to Council for a resolution to acquire the buses and receive the transfer. Gastonia will approach their Council on 11/13 to provide Gastonia's resolution to send to FTA and FTA will approve in writing. All documents are ready once the resolution from Gastonia is received. Gastonia buses will be placed with E1 route and will try them with other areas to see how they perform with the 35ft bus.

• **PUBLIC COMMENT II:** Mrs. Mary. H. Churney stated that a letter was sent to the Transit Center regarding a number of issues:

1. After 3 1/2 years learning the bus system; the 5/21/12 transit changes happened.
2. Mrs. Churney suggested fine tuning the old system.
3. Not enough options in catching the bus at Walmart.
4. Ms. Churney stated that most of the bus drivers are under tension as well as the passengers.

Julie stated that TC has talked with other riders who are learning about the system and there are ways to help riders to maximize and the most efficient use of the system.

Julie apologized to Ms. Churney but the hope is that transit is moving in the right direction for the whole system.

• **ANNOUNCEMENTS:** None

• **Agenda Items for next meeting:**

Meeting Adjourned at 5:00 pm.

1/15/2013